



**The Railroads Come to Buffalo:**

**A study of the railroad industry  
in Buffalo prior to 1860.**

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## PREFACE

The railroad industry has flourished in the City of Buffalo, New York for more than one and a quarter centuries. Since its inception it has profited by Buffalo commerce and in turn has stimulated industries to locate here.

The purpose of this essay is to look backwards to the time of the first steam railroad entering the city in an attempt at comprehending the tremendous success story of the railroads as evidenced in the history of our own Buffalo.

### Author's Note

Although this paper is chiefly concerned with happenings which occurred prior to 1860, material, such as a listing of the various railroads entering Buffalo, has been included to preserve overall continuity.

## GENERAL OUTLINE

- 1) Background - development of the first locomotives - definition of terms
- 2) Agitation for the railroads to come to Buffalo
- 3) Successive railroads entering Buffalo
- 4) William Wallace - rail promoter
- 5) Reasons for Buffalo's growth as a rail center
- 6) Impact of rail (and other) transportation on Buffalo business
- 7) Sidelines
- 8) The railroad mystique
- 9) Listing of the railroads entering Buffalo

It gives one pause to consider how rapidly the railroad industry has grown from modest beginnings to the multi-billion dollar complex it is today.

When James Watt contrived the first practical steam engine in the latter part of the eighteenth century, it was only a matter of time for human ingenuity to find methods of adapting this new force of energy to the needs of the industrial revolution.

Steam power was the revolutionary discovery which, concretized in the steam locomotive, opened the path for rapid transit of people and products. Through experimentation in England by Richard Trevethick, George and Robert Stevenson and other, a functional, practical engine evolved which could profitably transport cargo with great efficiency and rugged dependability. Their successes inspired Americans, and, more properly, Buffalonians, to secure this amazing new machine for the benefit of our own area.

The steam locomotive was truly an amazing machine. In its own way the engine was, perhaps, the most novel scientific breakthrough in the transportation field since the evolution of sailing ships. It paved the way for economical transit of merchandise which heretofore could be profitably transported only by water route. The advent of the steam locomotive heralded the opening of a new era in the transportation industry.

L.F. Loree, addressing the Holland Society of New York on November 23, 1936, dramatically illustrated the practical impact of the steam locomotive on land transportation with the following figures:

- 1.) The first transportational endeavor, which still persists in South Africa today, consists in a personal effort of packing one's own burden, whereby one porter can efficiently carry a 65 pound load a distance of 15 miles daily.
- 2.) Pack animals (horse) can carry a load of 200 pounds a distance of 25 miles daily.
- 3.) Wagons carrying a burden of one tone per horse averaged about 20 miles daily.
- 4.) Horse railways, on a downhill grade, averaged:
  - a.) two tons per horse on wooden rails.
  - b.) almost three tons per horse on iron rails.

These figures, contrasted with the achievement of carrying 102 tons of payload per engine, a record set by Stephenson's "Rocket" on October 6, 1829, triumphantly suggested to one and all the potentialities of the infant railroad industry.

Railways are by no means the brainchild of the nineteenth century. Archaeologists have found evidences of permanent stone rails in Babylon to which commercial use has been attributed. The ancient Greeks cut permanent ruts into mountain paths in order to keep wagons from slipping off precipices. Wooden tramways with primitive rail cars are known to have existed in sixteenth century European mines.

It is the steam locomotive, however, which takes the railroad out of the coal mines, providing a challenge to water transport for efficiency and economy in freight handling, and to the stage coach and other means of human conveyance in the field of passenger service.

Zerah Colburn provided a technical description of the steam locomotive in the middle of the nineteenth century which characterizes all steam locomotives built since then. In his words the steam locomotive is:

...a combination of three distinct arrangements. The source of the power lies in the boiler and firebox; the cylinders, valves, pistons and the connections are the means by which this power is applied to produce motion within the machine; and the wheels, by means of their adhesion to the rails, enables the exertion of the tractive force, securing the locomotion of the machinery which empels them, and from their surplus power above what is necessary to move the locomotive alone, to haul also the great load behind it upon the rails.<sup>1</sup>

Foresighted men in the city of Buffalo looked at the steam railroad and envisioned what its impact might be on the town. In 1829 when Stephenson's "Rocket" was chugging along the track of the Manchester and Liverpool Railroad in England, there was no especial economic advantage on the side of the railroad industry. Commerce was slow in the first part of the nineteenth century, and the railroad locomotive had not yet reached the speed or hauling capacity which would later characterize its great success.

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<sup>1</sup>L. F. Loree, The Transportation Significance of the Steam Railroad  
p. 7

Buffalo was determined, nevertheless, to have its own railroad; a dream which finally came to fruition in 1836. It is surprising to note how closely upon the heels of the discovery of the steam engine Buffalo was ready to make itself into a rail center. Richard Trevethick's experimental steam carriage made its trial run on Christmas Eve 1801. The developed carriage was soon put to work on the Welsh railways. In 1825 Gridley Bryant projected the first American railway. This was to be a horse drawn affair four miles in length extending from the granite quarries of Quincey, Massachusetts to the Neponset River\_\_\_not a radical departure from the tramway concept.

In 1827 the first American railraod was constructed from Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania to the Lehigh River. The motive behind the building of this horsedrawn railroad was shipment of coal and lumber to a transportational outlet ie. the Lehigh River.

The year 1829 marked the construction of the first railroad locomotive engine by George Stephenson in England. That same year the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company ran a practical, functional steam locomotive from its company mines near Honesdale, Pennsylvania to the terminus of the canal at Honesdale. By the year 1830, there existed only twenty-three miles of railroad track in the entire United States. Taking this state of affairs into consideration, it is amazing indeed that anyone would consider promoting a railroad in Buffalo. But enterprizing citizens of the Village did prepare to foster the railroad movement throughout its early stages.



The first steam railroad in New York State was chartered in 1826, constructed in 1830, and completed in 1831. This was the Mohawk and Hudson Railroad, which operated from Albany to Schenectady. The railroad opened for business in September of 1831, and by October it carried as many as four hundred excited passengers each day. This railroad later changed its name to the Albany and Schenectady Railroad.

Eastern capitalists were always mindful of investment opportunities offered by the West. Buffalo, the town situated at the eastern terminus of the Great Lakes, was the logical jumping off point for people and products going towards or coming from the West. In 1831 a movement agitated for the New York State legislature to grant a railway charter that would establish a rail connection between Buffalo and the Hudson River. This would bring into existence a regular transportation route secondary to the Erie Barge Canal, which opened in 1825. Passengers on this proposed road could travel from Buffalo to the Hudson River by rail continuing on to New York City by passenger packet boat, or vice versa.

In April of 1831 a group of Erie County residents addressed themselves to Governor Throop on behalf of the projected New York and Erie Railroad. A letter was posted to the Governor with the signatures of William R. Gwinn, David Lang, William Mills, Otis Turner, and

C. Vandevater "on the subject of a contemplated railroad from Buffalo to the Hudson River"<sup>1</sup> while urging "the propriety of its being built by the State."<sup>2</sup>

A Buffalo journal for the sixth of September carried a notice which read:

Railroad \_\_\_\_ At a numerous and respectable meeting of the citizens of Buffalo, held at the Eagle Tavern on the sixth of September, for the purpose of taking into consideration the subject of railroad communication between this place and the Hudson River, Bela D. Coe was called to the chair and James Stryker was appointed secretary.<sup>3</sup>

This meeting favored cooperation with interests in the central and eastern parts of the state for building the railroad. A committee was formed to promote the cause. Among its members were Lewis F. Allen, J. R. Carpenter, Bela D. Coe, Reuben B. Heacock, James McKnight, Herman B. Potter, Horatio Shumway, Isaac S. Smith, James Stryker, and Samuel Wilkeson.

The State Legislature never once believed that the proposed railroad would constitute a serious threat to the Erie Barge Canal competitionwise. A charter for the railroad might have been delayed had the state thought that the railways would surpass the canal, in construction of which the State had invested so much capital.

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Wayland Hill ed. Municipality of Buffalo, New York: A History 1720 - 1923 p. 480.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 481.

In 1834 the bill chartering the railroad was set before the legislature for approval. On February 23, 1835 Canal commissioners were asked for a report on relative maintenance costs between the railroad and the canal. The report surrendered stated, "It will not be difficult to show that the expense of transportation is very materially greater than on canals."<sup>1</sup> No unsurmountable objection was raised to block the granting of the charter. It took several years, however, for this railroad to become a reality.

By the year 1834 Buffalo had railroad track within city limits. In 1832 two companies received charters with Buffalo on their routes. The Buffalo and Erie Railroad Company was to operate from Buffalo through Chatauqua County to the Pennsylvania state line. Another company, the Aurora and Buffalo Railroad Company, was to operate between Buffalo and the Village of Aurora ie. now the Village of East Aurora. Unfortunately the Panic of 1837 interrupted this schedule of events, and both railroads lived and died on paper.

Buffalo had its share of speculators; among whom was one Benjamin Rathburn. He ascended the economic scale from landlord of the Eagle Tavern to owner of natural stone quarries and brickyards. Rathburn expanded into construction of stores and factories, and, at the time of his failure, had some 3,000 employees and no partner. When this "wheeler and dealer" was sentenced to five years in jail during the summer of 1836, the local population began to sober up and restrain their speculation craze.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

The Buffalo and Black Rock Railroad holds claim to be the first railroad in Erie County. Actually this was the three mile tramway, or horse railway which had begun operation in 1834. It was built mainly for the convenience of immigrants headed for Canada.

The Buffalo and Niagara Falls Railroad was the first true steam railroad to operate in Erie County. On August 26, 1836 the first train ran down that line from Black Rock to Tonawanda just in the nick of time before the financial panic. Agitation for the chartering of this road had begun in 1831 as a direct result of the opening of the Albany and Schnectady (Mohawk and Hudson) Railroad. In 1835 General Peter Porter was instrumental in starting construction on this pioneer railroad.

The first engine, affectionately called the "Little Buffalo", began its run on August 26, 1836. The locomotive weighed approximately nine tons. It had only two drive wheels permitting a speed of fifteen to twenty miles per hour. Another locomotive, appropriately called the "Niagara", was soon pressed into action. By September sixth Buffalo was made the terminus of the Buffalo and Niagara Falls Railroad. On November fifth regular train schedules between Buffalo and Niagara Falls were announced. Another set of tracks was constructed joining Lockport with Niagara Falls and continuing on to Lewiston.

The first trains operating in New York State (hence, those entering into Buffalo) were mainly passenger trains, since the canal was considered to be the most efficient freight handler available. On the Buffalo and Niagara Falls Railroad small, four wheeled coaches provided accommodations

for sixteen to twenty-four people. Each car was divided into two or three compartments with crosswise seats.

The tracks for this railroad consisted of two parallel lines of wood stringers six inches square and spiked to crossties. On each stringer was laid a flat bar of iron one-half or five-eighths inches thick, called a strap bar. This primitive method of covering track led to the nick-naming of the strap bar "trap bar." These rails were the peril of early passengers, since occasionally the iron bars would come unfastened, curving upward with the passage of trains so as to tear through the wooden coaches impaling the passengers. Improvements in the rails were soon effected, however, and this danger was greatly diminished.

The years before 1860 show a monumental expansion process taking place within the railroad industry. In August of 1836 subscription lists for the Buffalo and Attica Railroad were opened in Buffalo. The road was planned to extend from Buffalo to the Village of Attica in Wyoming County \_\_\_\_\_ a distance of thirty-one miles. This issue of stock was withdrawn, however, and was never offered again. In the meantime the cross-state railroad came nearer and nearer to Buffalo. The Albany and Schenectady road was stretched to Utica, New York in 1836. In 1839 a Utica to Syracuse road was opened. By January 8, 1843 Buffalo was connected by rail with Albany. The first cross-state railroad, petitioned for twelve years earlier, thus became a reality. A New York Central report for 1922 states that the Buffalo and Attica Railroad opened in December of 1842, but newspapers of October of the same year contain advertisements of

it in operation with a fifteen mile gap from Darien to Batavia connected by stage coach. In 1843 construction was begun to extend the Buffalo and Batavia Railroad to Hornellsville (now Hornell). Opened in 1852 this line connected with track of the New York and Erie Railway bringing that railroad into the City of Buffalo. In the same year a second line of rails was extended from Buffalo to Corning, New York.

The year 1852 also witnessed the completion of the Buffalo and Rochester Railroad (incorporating the Buffalo and Attica and Tonawanda roads). This was accomplished by laying thirty-six miles of track between Buffalo and Batavia. Early in 1852 the Buffalo and State Line Railroad linked with the chain of roads stretching along the southern shore of Lake Erie, opening a route to Chicago. On January 1, 1852 the line opened for business between Dunkirk and the Pennsylvania state line. On February 22, 1852 the Buffalo to Dunkirk part of the route opened.

In 1852 the Buffalo and Brantford (Ontario) Railroad made plans to extend service to Goderich. By 1858 this company had changed its name to the Buffalo and Lake Huron Railroad. Somewhat later this line was leased to the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada.

The familiar New York Central Railroad came into being in 1853. It was the result of a consolidation process involving the railroads running eastward from Buffalo to Albany. One year later uniform gauge track was installed on the railroads connecting Buffalo and Chicago, notably the Lake Shore Railroad and the Michigan Southern Railroad.

The decade between 1850 and 1860 was a time of great expansion, bringing Buffalo into even greater contact with other cities in the United States. J. N. Larned writes:

In that year (1851) two railways from the western end of Lake Erie to Chicago were brought into operation and the needed links between our State Line road and Toledo were filled in the next year completing a railway connection of Chicago with New York. In 1854 the chain was stretched from Chicago to the Mississippi and it was lengthened to the Missouri in 1859. Before that time a halt to all business enterprises had been called by the financial crash of 1857 and the halt was prolonged by the Civil War.

Meanwhile in 1852 Buffalo had been doubly connected with the New York and Erie railway by a line to Corning, built by the Buffalo and New York Railroad Company and a second line to Hornellsville (now Hornell), produced by an extension of the Buffalo and Attica road which the New York and Erie had leased. In this year, moreover, the railway connection of Buffalo with Canada and with the West through Canada was undertaken by the beginning of a Buffalo and Brantford road, which, being extended to Goderich in 1858 took the name of the Buffalo and Lake Huron railway. In 1853 the consolidation of the several roads between Buffalo and Albany in the New York Central was effected; and in 1855 the Buffalo and Niagara road was taken into the New York Central System.<sup>1</sup>

In the years from 1850 to 1858 about 20,000 miles of railroad track was laid in the United States, while much of the financial backing for the roads came from abroad. In August of 1857 another panic left most of the non-completed railroad projects in difficulty. It was not until after the Civil War that railroads began to grow rapidly once more.

During the years of rapid expansion one Buffalonian stands out as a dynamic force in bringing the railroads to Buffalo. His name is William Wallace. One of the unsung heroes of the Buffalo railroad industry, Wallace was instrumental in equipping our city with rail facilities.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 482

He set the Buffalo and Attica Railroad on its feet; having surveyed the route, engineered the trains, and finally superintended the road until 1848. He was the chief engineer of the Buffalo and State Line Railroad, and of the movement to extend the Buffalo and Attica Railroad to Hornellsville, connecting that road with the New York and Erie Railway. William Wallace surveyed and recommended the Buffalo and Lake Huron and Canada Southern Railroad. He surveyed the Buffalo to Batavia road which served to link Buffalo to Rochester by rail. William Wallace masterminded a long range plan to connect Buffalo by rail with the coal fields of Pennsylvania, bringing much freight business to Buffalo. He also influenced the building of the Buffalo and Washington Railroad which was first opened in 1873. This man, whose interests in railroading began with its inception, probably did more towards making Buffalo a national rail center than any other individual personality.

We can safely say that the general prosperity of Buffalo can be attributed to railroad facilities at least in part. In 1862 Guy H. Salisbury wrote:

In 1836 we had less than 16,000 inhabitants. Now (1862) we have in round numbers 100,000...In 1836 we had but a single railroad running into Buffalo\_\_\_that from Niagara Falls\_\_\_of not less than 20 miles in length, with no connection whatsoever with any other road. Now we have the New York Central, with its freight and passenger depots and enormous business\_\_\_The New York and Erie, the terminus of whose line is practically here\_\_\_the Buffalo and State Line, with its interminable western connections\_\_\_the Buffalo, Western and Grand Trunk railways...with over 2,000 miles of Canadian roads.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 483.

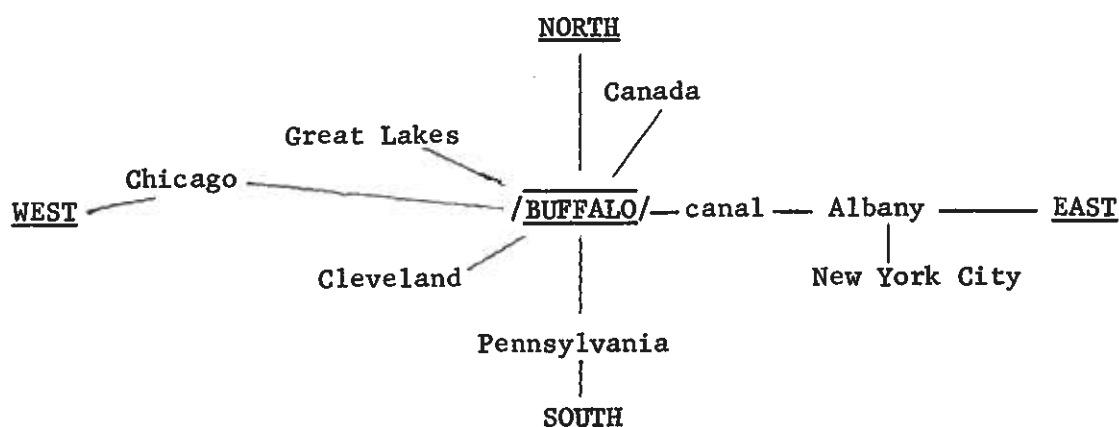


Up to this point we have been discussing the railroads from the point of view of their extension to and from the City of Buffalo. Now we must delve further into the issue, and search for reasons why the various railroad companies sought Buffalo as a terminus for their lines.

First of all Buffalo is, geographically speaking, a most natural place for a railroad to terminate. Its proximity to the Great Lakes and the Erie Barge Canal offered the possibility of financial investment to speculators interested in Buffalo's commercial potential. From another angle, the people of New York State were interested in establishing communication ties among the larger communities of the state, thus linking the more important towns together with greater cohesive force.

Buffalo, in its position as the westernmost town in New York State, would be one of the natural terminals (the other - New York City) if we keep this purpose of unification in mind. With a cross-state railroad in existence giving access to transit between New York City and the Great Lakes, it is also natural for railroads to connect Buffalo with cities such as Chicago, which was indeed considered to be the Far West in the early half of the nineteenth century.

As this rail system prospered, plans were made to run tracks south to the larger cities, and to the coal fields of Pennsylvania; opening more opportunities for commerce. Buffalo, too, is a frontier town bordering Canada. Though we seldom think of it as such, access to the wealth of raw materials offered by Canada was a considerable factor in the growth of Buffalo as a railroad center.



Hence we see the City of Buffalo with tracks extending in all directions—the hub of rail traffic and a commercial center profiting by the transshipment of goods.

Buffalo was the central and important point, a sort of "half-way house" between the east and west, and diverging points to the south-west and Canada, for transferring and reshipping passengers and the mails.<sup>1</sup>

Curiously enough the railroads did not look to commerce as a mainstay of profit during the era of their initiation. When the first railroads reached Buffalo, the engines simply did not have enough power to haul the tremendous loads which were then shipped through the Great Lakes system and the Erie Barge Canal. A train such as the "DeWitt Clinton" running between Albany and Schenectady at fifteen or twenty miles per hour did not present a serious challenge to the Erie Barge Canal for economy in transporting bulk materials. The slow moving barges were, as far as cost goes, an extremely practical method of transportation. They could accommodate tremendous loads and deliver them according to schedule in either direction along the canal.

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Samuel M. Welch, Recollections of Buffalo, p. 129.

New York State was extremely proud of the expensive canal, which had opened in 1825. One of the reasons that railroads were granted their charters so freely (as I mentioned before) was that one connected with the legislature felt they would vie with the canal in freight shipment.

If the railroads were not disposed to freight handling at the time of their inception, why were Buffalo citizens interested in them? The answer to this question lies in several directions.

First of all, the commercial value of the railroads was anticipated by reason of the vast technological advances made in the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century. At the time when the first railroad entered Buffalo, however, it was much cheaper to ship goods along the canal and lakes by water than by rail. When the engines became capable of handling greater loads at a more reasonable cost, competition with the barges and lakers began.

The major success of the railroad industry at first lay in the field of passenger service. We take the railroads and airplanes so much for granted these days that we lose sight of the impact that the steam locomotive had on the transportation business at the turn of the nineteenth century. Until that time the fastest, most economical means of public transit was the stage coach. Horses carrying one rider each were indeed faster, but horses tire out, and not all people are suited to traveling long distances over unknown ground at a rapid speed. This is precisely the state of affairs that Buffalo found itself in when word came to town of that amazing new machine—the steam locomotive.

The railroads were indeed a novelty to persons accustomed to depending on animals and quiet, graceful sailing ships for transportation. The "iron horse" as it was called, was an exciting machine. It was big, black, strong, and menacing as it puffed up clouds of ash and cinders into the air along the track. It was a breathtaking experience to travelers, adventurers, speculators, and thrill seekers. The railroad was rapid, reliable, and a source of much excitement to its first passengers.

Barring accidents such as derailments and strap bars, the locomotive was considered to be a safe means of transportation. Even the ladies were permitted to ride along in the first railroad cars. Mrs. Frances Kimble Butler, an actress of the English and American stage, rode Stephenson's "Rocket" on the Manchester and Liverpool run in 1829. She described the carriage as "...a long bodied vehicle with seats placed across it back to back".<sup>1</sup> In a letter to a friend she expressed her sensation of speed. The "Rocket" traveled "...faster than a bird flies (for they tried the experiment with a snipe)." <sup>2</sup> By 1829 Stephenson's locomotive had been clocked at thirty-five miles an hours.

The Buffalo promoters of just such a railroad were convinced that the industry would bring people and goods to Buffalo. As one author implied, Buffalo in the 1820's was, and still is, the easternmost of the great western settlements ie. a jumping off point to the West.

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Edward Lee, The Evolution of the Railways, p.9

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. p.13

New York State did not especially foster the idea of railroads as a means of transportation. But people of the state, Buffalonians as well as the eastern financiers, did not neglect this aspect of transit. The New York Central was projected in 1825. Competition had already begun with the New York and Erie Railroad, whose construction was hastened with the objective of diverting traffic which had gone to Boston from the West via Albany. By 1851 when this road reached Dunkirk, the railroad industry had already passed from an experimental stage into a functional one.

Another factor in the early development of the railroad industry was the relative comfort the passengers enjoyed in comparison with the other modes of transportation then in existence. One could take the leisurely canal packet from Buffalo to the Hudson and continue down the river on a palatial steamship. But this journey took nine days to complete. Overall speed on the canal was about four miles an hour. Yet some reactionaries complained of the fast movements of the canal packets.

At first the railroads did not do much better than the packets as far as speed was concerned. But the smooth comfort of the trains, as opposed to the slow barges or jouncing stage coaches was indeed gratifying. Testimonials from satisfied passengers increased the prestige of rail travel, hence the development of Buffalo as a rail center.

On July 6, 1838 Henry A.S. Dearborn was appointed Superintendent of Massachusetts. On August 3, 1838 he began in his journal a "Memorandum of a Journey to the Niagara Frontier." His sojourn, undertaken for the purpose of negotiating treaties with the Seneca and Tuscarora Indian tribes,

went as follows:

August 3 travel from New York City to Albany on steamboat

August 4 9:00 to 3:00 Albany to Utica by Train

canal boat to Syracuse

August 5 Syracuse to Auburn by horse car in two hours

On August 6 Mr. Dearborn noted:

I have passed a distance of 630 miles in three days and three hours and slept a comfortable night. Gad! what wonders has steam produced and what greater are yet to be developed, <sup>1</sup> nous verons.

Samuel M. Welch recalling his boyhood days in Buffalo testifies to the fact that the stage coach was by far not the romantic way of traveling.

In 1891 he writes the following in praise of the railroads:

Compare this mode of travel with that of the vestibule trains, sitting on velvet easy chairs, enjoying a complete dinner and wines, looking out of large plate glass windows, framing beautiful landscapes, or reading by the aid of electric lights while rolling smoothly at a speed of forty to fifty miles the hour.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Welch also noted that after the decline of the stage coach and its displacement, many former proprietors took on pursuits with affinity for the old businesses ie. canal, steamboat, rail lines, express work, telegraph service etc.

In 1836 the Schenectady and Utica road was authorized to carry only passengers and their personal baggage. The following year thirty-three miles of track was completed between Batavia and Rochester. In 1839 fifty-

<sup>1</sup>Henry A.S. Dearborn, "The Dearborn Journals", Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society, vol. 7, p.41

<sup>2</sup>Welch, op. cit., p. 132

three miles of track connected Utica with Syracuse. The following year seventy-six miles of track linked Auburn and Rochester.

By 1843 all lines of track were closed from Buffalo to Albany, but the service was not operated as a through line. Each one of these little railroads was operated under separate ownership, therefore, each railroad had its own short haul schedule. On July 10, 1843 the first express service between Buffalo and Albany was inaugurated. For the paltry sum of \$11.50 travelers were encouraged to ride "in the best cars" down the entire road in the breathtaking time of twenty-five hours. In 1848 this time was cut to twenty-two hours. In 1850 fares were slashed to a modest \$9.75.

On August 1, 1853 the New York Central Railroad amalgamated the roads running east from Buffalo into a single ownership. These were the: Albany and Schenectady, Schenectady and Troy, Utica and Schenectady, Mohawk Valley, Syracuse and Utica, Syracuse and Utica Direct, Rochester and Syracuse, Buffalo and Rochester, Buffalo and Lockport, the Rochester Lockport and Niagara Falls. In 1831, when the Mohawk and Hudson Railroad opened, it was believed impossible to compete with the steamboats which had plied the Hudson for twenty-four years.

Changing to the westward scene: May of 1852 marked the inauguration of rail service between Toledo and Chicago. In 1853 a Toledo to Cleveland road was opened. The following year track was extended from Cleveland to Buffalo opening up a rail system to the West.

We have seen so far how the railroad industry filled the need for rapid transit of people as well as catering to their comfort. The rail coach evolved from an open box with crosswise seats into a rail replica of the old stage coaches, into its characteristic proportions of today. Until the golden age of the automobile and the coming of the airplanes, the railroad was firmly entrenched in our country as "the" way for people to travel.

Now we must turn our attention to the industrial aspect of the railroad industry. For this is truly the endeavor through which the rails have made their success in Buffalo.

Since Buffalo is located in such a strategic spot (see p.13), it is only natural for Buffalo to become the transhipping center of the North. Goods coming off the Great Lakes and canals were shipped to other destinations via the railroads. Originally, however, the railroads had been overlooked by commercial interests as a method of transportation because:

- 1.) Railroad costs were prohibitive.
- 2.) Through service did not exist. For example, in going from Buffalo to Albany or vice versa one had to change trains each time the terminus of one of the small railroads was reached, even though they ended a short distance from each other.
- 3.) The railroads could not offer much greater speed than the canal system to compensate for the much greater cost of railroad shipment.



The Great Lakes and the Erie Barge Canal had the momopoly on freight handling until about 1850, when the improved locomotive became a serious threat to canal shipping. Engines had increased in their hauling abilities. Then freight rates dropped as railroad cars were redesigned to carry greater loads. When speed was added to these factors, a tremendous dent was made in canal traffic. The handwriting was on the wall as early as 1844 when the New York State legislature saw no harm in granting the railroads permission to carry freight in the winter when the canal was frozen over.

In 1847 the railroads of New York State were comissioned to carry freight all year long on the condition that railroads would give to the state the same toll per mile that canals would have earned for the same service\_\_\_a restriction imposed on all railroads within thirty miles of the Erie Barge Canal and enforced until February 1851. Competition with the waterways achieved a general regulation of railroad rates in the long run. In the face of the formidable railroads, canal interests formed several movements to abolish tolls on the canals (in order that business should survive). As the railroads grew, rapid transit became more and more the objective of the various lines. As "Time is Money" became the s@lgan for many industries, engineering science put out a constant effort to attain the maximum possible safe speed. On May 12, 1846 the Hudson River Railroad was chartered, establishing a link between New York City and Albany. When this line became connected with that of the New York Central Railroad, a direct route opened between Buffalo and New York City by rail. On November 1, 1869 the Hudson River Railroad became officially a part of the New York Central Railroad system.

By the year 1900 Buffalo had become the second largest railroad center in the United States. It reached such a pinnacle of success through Buffalo business. Our city got its start as a center of commerce through water travel, but the railroads soon came into their own and contributed as well to Buffalo's development. Our city is a desirable location for industry today because of the supporting transportation facilities which are close at hand.

Buffalo had become a Port of Entry as early as 1805, when imported peltries were exchanged for exported salt. Among Buffalo's earlier industries were grain storage, milling, and lumber. Indeed, Buffalo gave the elevator method of grain storage to the world.

When the "prairie west" opened for homesteading, farms began to produce and Buffalo's grain imports increased. Our city became a grain handling port in only one year. In 1829 4,335 bushels of flour and 3,640 bushels of wheat are recorded as being shipped to Buffalo. In 1830 181,029 bushels came to town. Five years earlier S. Ball, a writer, wrote a pamphlet mourning the death of grist mills in Buffalo. Regarding the situation he wrote:

It may be unworthy to note that the value of wheat is not known here, nor is there ever a bushel for sale; this is undoubtedly occasioned by the want of mills, or streams to set them upon, there being none within a less distance of eleven miles. There can be no hazard in saying that surplus capital could not be better invested than in that of a steam grist mill, nor would the establishment of any other factor be of equal advantage to the community.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Wayland Hill, Municipality of Buffalo, New York: A History 1720-1923, p. 737

With the influx of the western grain market, such mills were provided for. By 1835 flour handling along the canal was substantial. Little was handled eastward on the railroads, but in 1889 the railroad surpassed the canal in flour shipment.

Of definite importance to the growth of the grain industry was the invention of the steam elevator by Joseph Dart. In 1835 112,000 bushels of grain entered Buffalo. The next year 500,000 bushels were shipped. In 1841 2,000,000 bushels came from farmers who had been given homesteads in the West. The grain was carried from the lakers to warehouses along the Buffalo waterfront in bags and baskets by Irish workingmen. In this manner some 2,000 bushels could be moved on an average work day. No grain could be transported on rainy days (spoilage) or on windy days (it would all be blown away). Joseph Dart's scheme of elevating grain by steam power was ridiculed. A Mahlon Kingman is reported as telling Dart that he should give up his fancies with the words, "Irishmen's backs are the cheapest elevators built."<sup>1</sup> In 1842 Dart's elevator was the first to meet the pressing needs of the grain shippers in Buffalo.

The railroads transported lumber as well as grain. At first trees were cleared away to make way for the settlement now known as Buffalo. Later, when the treeless prairie farmers needed lumber to build their homes, shipments of area lumber were slated for western delivery. In 1829 Samuel D. Golie brought the first Pennsylvania lumber to Buffalo for reshipment. Lumber going eastward went by barge since it was not vital there.

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<sup>1</sup>Local History Scrapbook, vol. 9, p. 39

The coal industry has also been a mainstay of the railroad business for many years. Until 1842 little interest was taken of coal as a heating product. Trees were felled for housing; lumber was the most readily obtainable heating product. In 1842 records show that shipment of coal jumped to 900,000 tons from a very meager figure. By 1890 this industry had mushroomed into a 7,485,170 ton annual business. In 1920 over 15,000,000 tons of coal passed through the City of Buffalo. The bulk of this shipment passed westward and to Canada. In 1842 W.T. and G.R. Wilson opened a coal company in Buffalo. Coal from the Blossburgh, Pennsylvania basin was shipped to Corning, then to the canal via Watkins and Geneva. Later this coal was shipped to Binghamton and the Chenango and Erie canals. By 1877 some 200,000 tons of coal were shipped in this manner. Buffalo had received coal for transshipment in 1842. As demands from the West increased, railroads met this more urgent need. In 1875 the Lehigh Valley Railroad opened offices in Buffalo. A great deal of this company's energy is devoted to the transshipment of coal.

In 1839 William F. Harden established the Railway Express. A conductor in his thirties, he thought up the idea of having a "package express" between New York and Boston. This service was extended to Philadelphia and on to Albany, when Henry Wells brought it to Buffalo. In 1842 Wells achieved the crowning success of his career by shipping fresh oysters from Albany to a Buffalo caterer at \$3.00 per hundred oysters: a most noble feat.

The railroads offered dividends to many people in the form of reduction of postal rates. Before the coming of the railroads these were proportionately higher all over the world. In the 1830's Rowland Hill, an English railroad man, followed a postman to the door of a small ordinary dwelling and observed the woman who answered scrutinize her envelope in a stupid manner, while the postman waited for his change. (At this time postage was paid upon receipt of the letter.) When the woman handed the letter back and told the postman she had no money, Hill chivalrously offered to chase after her letter and redeem it. The woman declined, saying it wasn't necessary. The letter was from her brother who wrote his communications in code on the envelope to avoid payment of postage. This and other dodges were employed before the railroads brought about a cheaper mail service. Samuel M. Welch writes:

The greater facilities for transporting the mails by the introduction of steam power, seemed to demand a reduction of postage, from what it had been a century previous. It was also the opinion of thinking men, that by such a reform, it would so augment the quantity of mail matter, as soon to be able to maintain its own expense, while at the same time it would be a collaborator in educating the people.<sup>1</sup>

Many "firsts" can be attributed to the railroads entering Buffalo. For example, the Portage Viaduct which stretches across the Genesee River in Letchworth Park 235 feet above the river. As it was built in 1852, the bridge, constructed of wood, had an 800 foot span. The Portage Viaduct was acclaimed one the wonders of the world by those who saw it. On May 6, 1875 the bridge burned. Twelve weeks and four day later it was reconstructed of wrought iron, later to be reinforced with steel. It is humorous to

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<sup>1</sup> Welch, op. cit., p. 128

us today when we consider in retrospect how little engineers of that day knew about stresses in construction. The builders couldn't be sure the bridge was safe until it was tried. First a flat car loaded with iron was nudged across it. The bridge vibrated, but no inherent weakness was pointed up. Next a locomotive was sent across, then a locomotive and seven coaches, then five loaded trains. Today the same viaduct remains.

Before the International Bridge was built in 1870, the Buffalo, Brantford and Goderich Railroad had to cross the Niagara River near the foot of Porter Avenue by ferry. This was the first rail car ferry in the world. In 1850 James Wadsworth turned down a second term as Mayor of Buffalo to become president of that company. He was a co-builder of one of the first sleeping cars built for the convenience of the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) when he came to visit America in 1859.

Another interesting bridge crossing the Niagara River for the benefit of the railroads is the Whirlpool Rapids Bridge. In 1949 this was a suspension foot bridge; the first line of which was carried across the gorge by kite, for which the kite flier was awarded a \$5.00 prize. Passengers could be hauled across the river in an iron basket breeches bouy—the ultimate in thrill seeking. By 1855 the bridge was opened to passenger travel as well as to the railroads. The bridge stood until 1897, when the present Whirlpool Rapids Bridge was constructed.

A sort of mystique has grown up around the railroad industry in which Buffalo has taken part. Casey Jones could have proudly engineered any of the Buffalo locomotives. Following the sea-going tradition, these

are always referred to in the feminine gender. The "Little Buffalo" and "Niagara" of the Buffalo and Niagara Falls line, Lackawanna's "Spitfire," and the "DeWitt Clinton" of the Mohawk and Hudson stood up well in the limelight of England's proud "Rocket." In 1921 the "DeWitt Clinton" proved her mettle once more by coming out of retirement to run the Buffalo to Albany line with three coaches before loading onto a more modern freight bound for a Chicago railroad progress exhibition. The little locomotive had seen fourteen years of service on the Albany to Schenectady run.

Conductors on the earlier passenger trains dressed more formally than they do now according to a photo in the Buffalo Evening News of July 6, 1953. Two conductors wearing high silk hats hold storm lanterns to examine the tickets in dimly lit New York Central coaches. Both the lantern and the conductor's ticket punch might be gold plated for veterans fond of show.

Some of the smaller early railroad lines are serving industry today. The Peanut Line (originally the Canandaigua Niagara Falls Railroad), a one track branch of the New York Central between Tonawanda and Caledonia, now serves the National Gypsum Company. The Peanut Line has retained its name from the year 1855 when Dean Richmond, vice-president of the New York Central, took possession of the road which was only "a peanut of a line."

Railroading has always offered a thrill to many people. Interest begins in childhood for many, who wave at engineers and count the cars. The excitement of running a big locomotive was captured, perhaps a bit effusively by a reporter of the Times in 1931. The stretch of track that is written about is the same covered by the Attica and Buffalo in 1842:

"Come on" yelled Leid (William), from the engineer's side of the cab. "I want you to take her over the 'Hogback'" a big hill on the Buffalo side of Attica. And I took her oh I took her!

I swung the reverse wheel back in the corner. Full power ahead. I opened the throttle a little.

"Widen out," they yelled.

I opened her wide.

White marker on the track "W" on it. Crossing 1300 feet ahead. I whistled two longs, two shorts. White smoke in my eyes. Snow in my face. Wind whistling around my collar.

A signal post. Raised arm. Green light. "Clear block," I yelled at Bill. "Clear block," Bill yelled to me. Man by the track ahead. I whistled. He stepped away.

"Here's the top," King yelled in my ear above the engine's roar. "Shut her off. Shut her off!"

I released the throttle, closed it.

Signal light "Clear block." Crossing signal. Whistle. White steam blowing back. White ground beneath. Silver rails hidden in the snow. Old 2960 plowing through.<sup>1</sup>

Besides the more obvious improvements brought about by the railroads such as an increase of commerce and transportational advances, more subtle refinements as new legal regulations have come into being. The railroads have helped to expand our country as well as our city; have made millions for men who dared risk their savings on the new venture, and have contributed to the cultural heritage of our America.

In conclusion I submit the following listing (after Larned) of the railroads entering Buffalo. The list is offered in the spirit of typing up loose ends which naturally occur when a breach of 103 years (1860-1963) is made in railroad history:

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<sup>1</sup>Local History Scrapbook, op. cit., "The Railroads Entering Buffalo" p. 65



- 1836 Buffalo and Niagara Falls - acquired by the New York Central Railroad in 1855 and extended to Lewiston
- 1843 Buffalo and Attica - connected Buffalo with the chain of roads reaching towards Albany - acquired by the Buffalo and New York Railroad and extended to Hornellsville to connect with the New York and Erie Railway then progressing toward Dunkirk.
- 1852 New York and Erie Railway - brought into connection with Buffalo by completion of the Buffalo and Attica road to Hornellsville; also by a second line of connecting rails from Buffalo to Corning
- 1852 Buffalo and Rochester - completed to Buffalo by building a direct line of rails between Buffalo and Batavia - included the next year in the consolidation with the New York Central
- 1852 Buffalo and State Line - Buffalo linked with the chain of roads aiming for Chicago
- 1852 Buffalo and Brantford - extended to Goodrich - name changed in 1858 to the Buffalo and Lake Huron Railroad - 1870 line was leased to Grand Trunk (Niagara River bridged at Buffalo in 1874 by the International Bridge)
- 1853 consolidation of New York Central Railroad
- 1854 uniform gauge established on roads entering Chicago
- 1869 consolidation of New York Central and Hudson River railroads

- 1869 consolidation of the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern and several connecting roads
- 1870 Buffalo Creek - connecting industrial facilities within Buffalo leased to Erie and Lehigh Valley in 1889
- 1873 Canada Southern Railway - from Buffalo to Amherstberg on the Detroit River - leased to the Michigan Central
- 1873 Buffalo and Washington Railway - from Buffalo to Emporium, Pa. - opened anthracite resources and a shortened route to Philadelphia and Washington - later absorbed by the Pennsylvania system
- 1875 Buffalo and Jamestown - became Buffalo and Southwestern in 1877 - leased to Erie in 1881
- 1882 New York, Chicago, and Saint Louis (Nickle Plate) Railroad - completed to Chicago
- 1882 New York, Lackawanna and Western - from Buffalo to Binghamton
- 1883 Buffalo, Pittsburgh and Western - from Buffalo to Brocton - now a part of the Pennsylvania system
- 1883 Buffalo, Rochester and Pittsburgh
- 1884 Lehigh Valley - had formerly run coal cars on Erie tracks - acquired right of way in 1882
- 1884 West Shore - of Lake Huron - leased to New York Central in 1885

- 1897 Toronto, Hamilton and Buffalo
- 1897 Wabash - using Grand Trunk track
- 1907 Buffalo and Susquehena Railroad - from Wellesville to Buffalo -  
originally part of a sawmill - creative enterprise

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